Inferences with less cooperativity

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Cooperativity in pragmatics

quence in question fail to hold. So *some* implicatures are conventional, unlike the one with which I introduced this discussion of implicature.

I wish to represent a certain subclass of nonconventional implicatures, which I shall call *conversational* implicatures, as being essentially connected with certain general features of discourse; so my next step is to try to say what these features are. The following may provide a first approximation to a general principle. Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction. This purpose or direction may be fixed from the start (e.g., by an initial proposal of a question for discussion), or it may evolve during the exchange; it may be fairly definite, or it may be so indefinite as to leave very considerable latitude to the participants (as in a casual conversation). But at each stage, *some* possible conversational moves would be excluded as conversationally unsuitable. We might then formulate a rough general principle which participants will be expected (ceteris paribus) to observe, namely: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. One might label this the Cooperative Principle.

On the assumption that some such general principle as this is acceptable, one may perhaps distinguish four categories under one or another of which will fall certain more specific maxims and submaxims, the following of which will, in general, yield results in accordance with the Cooperative Principle. Echoing Kant, I call these categories Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. The category of Quantity relates to the quantity of information to be provided, and under it fall the following maxims:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

(The second maxim is disputable; it might be said that to be overinformative is not a transgression of the Cooperative Principle but merely a waste of time. However, it might be answered that such overinformativeness may be confusing in that it is liable to raise side

issues; and there may also be an indirect effect, in that the hearers may be misled as a result of thinking that there is some particular *point* in the provision of the excess of information. However this may be, there is perhaps a different reason for doubt about the admission of this second maxim, namely, that its effect will be secured by a later maxim, which concerns relevance.)

Under the category of Quality falls a supermaxim—"Try to make your contribution one that is true"—and two more specific maxims:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Under the category of Relation I place a single maxim, namely, "Be relevant." Though the maxim itself is terse, its formulation conceals a number of problems that exercise me a good deal: questions about what different kinds and focuses of relevance there may be, how these shift in the course of a talk exchange, how to allow for the fact that subjects of conversation are legitimately changed, and so on. I find the treatment of such questions exceedingly difficult, and I hope to revert to them in later work.

Finally, under the category of Manner, which I understand as relating not (like the previous categories) to what is said but, rather, to *how* what is said is to be said, I include the supermaxim—"Be perspicuous"—and various maxims such as:

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

And one might need others.

It is obvious that the observance of some of these maxims is a matter of less urgency than is the observance of others; a man who has expressed himself with undue prolixity would, in general, be open to milder comment than would a man who has said something he believes to be false. Indeed, it might be felt that the importance of at least the first maxim of Quality is such that it should not be included in a scheme of the kind I am constructing; other maxims come into operation only on the assumption that this maxim of Quality is satisfied. While this may be correct, so far as the generation of implicatures is concerned it seems to play a role not totally different from the other maxims, and it will be convenient, for the present at least, to treat it as a member of the list of maxims.

Cooperativity in pragmatics

- Idea: cooperative speakers adhere to the Cooperative Principle

- Because they do this, they make additional inferences available to the hearer

This morning I checked my emails, had coffee, and got up

4. Be orderly.

Uncooperativity in pragmatics

- (How) do we account for speakers who do not adhere to the CP?

  - For instance, violators of the Maxim of Quality – liars and BSers (Frankfurt)

    1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
    2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

  - "other maxims come into operation only on the assumption that [at least the first] maxim of Quality is satisfied" (Grice 1975: 27)

  - But it very frequently isn't...

Two-part example

P: Do you have any bank accounts in Swiss banks, Mr. Bronston?
B: No, sir.
P: Have you ever?
B: The company had an account there for about six months, in Zurich.
                                        (Solan and Tiersma 2005)

- The second exchange is of particular legal interest
  - Does B's utterance carry an exhaustivity implicature? If so, has B committed perjury if he too had a Swiss bank account in the past?
- But the first also requires some kind of cooperativity (Asher and Lascarides 2013)
  - What makes us think that the explicature of *No, sir* relates to the preceding question otherwise?
- Here we can't *assume* adherence to Quality on B's part

Artificial example

Parent: What happened to the cookies?

Child: I didn't eat them!

- Granted that the child did in fact eat the cookies that were being asked about, do we interpret their utterance as
  - a lie, in which *them* refers to the same cookies referred to by the parent with the phrase *the cookies*, or
  - a true statement, in which *them* refers to some other referents which the child did not in fact eat?

- If the former, then we're not assuming Quality adherence and seeing what else we can conclude…

- …rather, we're drawing inferences on some other basis and then deciding whether to believe the speaker
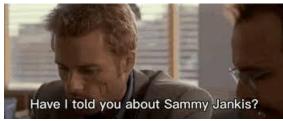
Would this be news to Grice?

- My usual answer seems to be 'no'
- We can, as Asher and Lascarides put it, "retreat" to the level of the speaker's intention
    - But from a Gricean perspective we were already there

- How does a Gricean approach address lying?
    - One question: can implicatures count as lies? (Weissman and Terkourafi 2019, among others, address this)
    - A more general question: do we expect pragmatics to work the same way when a speaker is lying as when they are telling the truth?
        - Presumably yes, because we don't know whether they're lying...

Acquiring Quality-indifference

- Grice (1975: 29) does suggest that speakers develop the habit of CP adherence in childhood
  - "It is much easier, for example, to tell the truth than to invent lies" (ibid.)

- But then we also acquire storytelling in childhood…
  - …and these stories don't seem to be disclaimed, for preference

  - We seem to expect the pragmatics to work the same way (perhaps unless faced with an unreliable narrator)

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- Arguably, we like to tell lies, and prefer to tell them in an efficient way
  - Potentially beneficial for the recipient of those lies too…

What is 'Quality'?

- And what are the Gricean maxims (supposed to be)?
  - Not a guide to being a good interlocutor
  - Not a set of normative rules you have to follow to be 'cooperative' (hence the possibility of flouting etc.)

- Rather, the assumptions that a hearer should make about how a speaker is disposed to behave
  - Similar story in Relevance Theory

- Quality does not enjoin speakers to make truthful statements
  - It enjoins hearers to act as though speakers are doing this, for the purpose of establishing what they are trying to convey
  - Part of a general principle "which participants will **be expected**…to observe" (Grice 1975: 26, my emphasis)

- A speaker who lies pretends to be cooperative with respect to Quality but typically is cooperative w.r.t. other maxims

- Sometimes real-world truth does seem to bear upon pragmatic interpretation
  - For instance, in understanding metaphor or irony

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.

| G | | C | | G |
A winter's day, in a deep and dark december;

Am D7 C   G Am   Bm   Am   Bm
I am alone, gazing from my window to the streets below

      Am   C   D
On a freshly fallen silent shroud of snow.

C   G   C   D7 G
I Am A Rock, I am an island.

Reality intrudes

- Sometimes real-world truth does seem to bear upon pragmatic interpretation
  - For instance, in understanding metaphor or irony
  - Here, we are not 'charitable', in the Davidson sense (cf. *I haven't eaten*) – we first enrich the meaning, then potentially disagree with it
  - Sperber et al. (2010): we satisfy our Relevance needs, then apply epistemic vigilance
  - But for an utterance such as *My lawyer is a cage-fighter*, not obvious that enrichment is necessary…although the result may be practically speaking more likely to be true
  - Interplay between apparent meaning, real-world plausibility, speaker's likely intended contribution…
  - …plus whether they're a good Gricean, in the sense of having behaviour that is described well by the maxims (?)

Not entirely cooperative speakers

- Focusing here on expressions of numerical quantity, because
  - I usually do
  - There are a lot of them out there
  - They convey a (sometimes illusory) sense of scientific rigour and precision
  - Many (most?) of them are in fact provided by speakers who are not wholly cooperative, in any meaningful sense
    - This motivates a need for fact-checking, but our semantic and pragmatic theories (I'd argue) don't usefully equip that activity

Unclear semantic and pragmatic meanings

- Ambiguity in terms of truth-conditions
    - *30 people came to the meeting*

- Debatable pragmatic enrichments, such as quantity implicatures
    - *More than 30 people came to the meeting* +> 'not more than 40/50' (cf. Cummins et al. 2012)?
    - *...* +> 'not more than 30 x 1.15' (cf. Hesse and Benz 2020)?
    - These two accounts rely on different premises, with the former more linguistic and the latter more psychological, broadly speaking

Worse: speakers with agendas

- Can I say *More than 30 people came to the meeting* if I know that exactly 51 people came?
    - What if I know that exactly 31 people came?

- Sometimes a speaker's agenda is obvious enough
    - *Bielefeld is among the 20 largest cities in Germany*
    - *Bielefeld is among the 19 largest cities in Germany*

- May need to discern the speaker's argumentative aims in order to figure out what they're actually committing to
    - Or, to put it another way, how they stand vis-à-vis Quantity
    - We (fairly clearly) draw comparable inferences about the speaker's knowledge state (e.g. from *At least 20 people signed the petition*)
    - But drawing inferences about argumentative agendas is tricky, because there are so many possible agendas in play…

Example

- *We've received more than 350 abstracts for AMLaP*

- Compatible with (among others) the following situations:
  - 350 < A < 400, and I count in 50s
  - A > 350 but not by much, hence 350 is a good reference point
  - I know A > 350 but that's all I know
  - A > 350 and 350 is a salient threshold
  - A > 400 and I'm downplaying our success
  - A < 350 and I'm lying or misinformed

- How do we navigate these possibilities, as hearers?
  - Consider all possibilities probabilistically? (If so, how do we represent them, and how do we winnow the field?)
  - Commit to a position about my likely intentions/honesty and reason from it? (If so, at what point do we abandon those commitments if the conclusions arrived at are unsatisfactory?)

- Better example for study: *p < 0.05*

Summary

- Non-cooperative (or not fully cooperative) speakers represent an interesting challenge to and a good testbed for pragmatic theories

- I think some of the challenging cases can be dealt with by sharpening, rather than abandoning, traditional theoretical commitments

- However, speakers who set out to mislead while adhering to semantic (and even pragmatic) truth represent more of a challenge...

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